



## **Symbiotic by FallingStar95**

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**Summary:** When he didn't move, she settled for wrapping her arms around him and holding him tightly. "Do you remember that night you pulled me out of the Upside Down? How you stayed with me through the night because I was so afraid?" she reminded him. "That meant the world to me, Jonathan... Now let me be here for you tonight." JANCY, now a TWO-SHOT fic. Reviews are very much appreciated!

## **1. She lifted up her wings**

His face may not have been bruised and bleeding like Steve's had been upon their return from Hopper's cabin, but Nancy could tell that Jonathan Byers was hurting all the same. She knew it was in his nature to be more introverted, but even so, she had never seen him this quiet. As he'd driven them back to the Byers' home earlier that night, she almost wanted to make him stop the car so that she could take the wheel for him, despite her lack of driving experience. His face was paler than chalk, and his hands shook so badly she could almost feel the vibrations from her spot in the passenger seat. She'd tried to take one of his hands to offer a bit of comfort, but he'd insisted that he'd be fine as long as he kept both of them on the wheel while he drove. However, despite his sudden inclination to drive as safely as possible, he'd continually glanced away from the road to look back at his mother and Will slumped in the backseat, as if his little brother could vanish if he didn't keep checking to make sure he was still back there, alive and well.

As soon as their car had reached the familiar house, so much started happening at once that Nancy could barely keep track of it all. Lucas had run out to the car to alert them that Hopper and El had come back minutes before they had while Dustin shouted over him in an attempt to explain the presence of a dead Demo-dog in the Byers' fridge. Hopper was dragging a disoriented-looking Billy Hargrove towards his cruiser while Steve limped behind, Hopper having insisted that the teen go to the hospital for what was probably a concussion. Mike and El had been lounged on the futon watching TV, the latter looking utterly exhausted, but content nonetheless to be held in the younger Wheeler sibling's arms.

And as all this chaos took place across the household, Jonathan seemed to be tuning out everything as he gently picked up Will and carried him to his bedroom, Joyce trailing behind in her sons' wake. Nancy was tempted to follow them, to make sure the small family was okay, but she didn't want to intrude upon their moment alone. Instead, she figured she would stay for a while where she seemed to be most needed: remaining with the kids since Steve had left. First and foremost, she made sure everyone was fed, watered, and

uninjured before turning to the curly-haired child leaning against her brother's shoulder. "How are you feeling, El?"

The young girl wearily blinked her eyes open to look at the older teen. "Tired," she whispered hoarsely, her vocal cords having pretty much given out back at the lab.

"Do you want to go try and get some sleep?" Nancy asked, concerned. "The Chief has to drive Billy and Max home and then take Steve to the hospital, so he won't be back for a while."

Eleven thought on this for a few moments before answering. "Not alone," she insisted, limply craning her neck to look around at her friends. "I don't want to be alone."

Nancy nodded her understanding and instructed the two to move for a moment so that she could pull the couch out. That way, the four remaining kids could fit and none would have to deal with any potential nightmares alone that evening. Although all of them passed out fairly quickly, she decided to search for any extra blankets that might be lying around for them to use; it was a fairly chilly November night. She'd tossed a couple more throws overtop of them before she came to a halt in her search, having explored every room in the house except for the bedrooms. However, as she paced the hallway a final time, she noticed that Will's bedroom door was slightly cracked, letting a sliver of light into the dim room. She didn't mean to pry, but she happened to see the outline within the room of Joyce Byers curled up in Will's small bed, her arms wrapped protectively around her sleeping son. The family matriarch must have noticed Nancy standing near the doorway when she smiled good-naturedly towards her. "Thank you again, Nancy," she whispered. "Thank you for helping me get my Will back."

The teen returned Joyce's smile. "Of course," she replied. "I'm just glad he's okay."

Joyce nodded minutely, running her hand affectionately through Will's unruly mop of brown hair. "Jonathan just went to his room, if you're looking for him," she mentioned when she looked back up. "He'd hate me if he knew I told you this... but he *really* cares about you, Nancy. I can tell," she explained. "But I think *he's* the one who's

going to need some care tonight. He's pretty shaken up... I guess we all are."

Nancy nodded her head. "I'll talk to him," she promised, heading in the direction of his room before she heard Joyce whisper to her one more time.

"I'm so glad you two have each other," she said with a sleepy smile. "Thank you for being there... for *both* of my boys."

But as Joyce slumbered off once again, Nancy couldn't help but grin. She had never felt this close to Steve's family when they were dating. But now, it was such a good feeling to be trusted and appreciated by the only woman who cared for Jonathan as much as she did, if not more... Probably more.

She quietly tiptoed away from Will's door, not wanting to cause any more disturbance to the house's other sleeping occupants. Instead, she ventured towards the only other person she knew would be awake, presumably held captive by his thoughts. Indeed, as she approached his room, she could already hear the sound of heavy, erratic breathing coming from behind the thin, wooden door. Not wanting to startle him, she lightly tapped her knuckles on the door before gingerly turning the knob and stepping inside. "Jonathan? It's just me."

The eldest Byers brother was sitting on the edge of his bed facing the wall opposite her, his elbows resting on his knees with his hands holding his face. He looked like every ounce of energy had been drained from his body, but of course, sleep would still escape him that night after having seen what they had seen. As she moved to sit beside him, his breathing suddenly became more rigid, almost as if he was trying to *force* himself to be calm and collected in her presence, which was the very opposite of what she knew he was really feeling.

She laid her hand on his back and gently rubbed it in small circles, placing her other hand comfortingly on his knee. "Jonathan..." she spoke softly. "It's okay if you're not okay," she assured him, holding back a shiver as she recalled the memory of Will's recent exorcism. "I'm here... and I'm not going anywhere."

At her words, his breathing hitched, and she noticed a couple stray teardrops slip between his fingers onto his jeans. Gently, she touched his wrist, silently trying to convince him to look up at her. When he didn't move, she settled for wrapping her arms around him and holding him tightly. "Do you remember that night you pulled me out of the Upside Down? How you stayed with me through the night because I was so afraid?" she reminded him. "That meant the world to me, Jonathan... Now let me be here for you tonight."

There was utter silence for a few moments as his heavy breathing halted... and eventually, he let his hands fall into his lap. As she'd already expected, his eyes were red and swollen, and the rest of his face was blotchy with moisture from the tears he'd shed. He hadn't yet gathered the strength to meet her gaze, but after taking a minute to control his breathing, he opened his mouth to speak. "I almost lost him *again*," he managed to say, his voice thick with emotion. "This time, I almost lost them *both*! If you hadn't grabbed that poker, I—" he trailed off, squeezing his eyes shut as another wave of tears threatened to spill over. "God, I don't even want to think about it."

"Then don't," she encouraged him gently. "They're safe, we're safe. The gate's closed. That... that *thing* is never coming near us again."

He bobbed his head the tiniest bit in response, squeezing his eyes shut before he spoke again. "I just felt so... Jesus, I'm just so *useless*," he stammered. He must have felt Nancy's shocked gaze on him since he eventually continued to elaborate. "If it had just been me in there—I mean, without you or Mom... then Will would be dead. Or worse," he said with a shiver. "God, I couldn't even help my mom when he was... when he tried to— When he was choking—" Just the mere recollection of what had happened was enough to get him worked up again, and his head fell back into his hands. Nancy remained silent for a few seconds, half-expecting him to continue talking, but his shoulders soon began to shake with near-silent sobs.

Without a second thought, she pulled the boy into her arms and held him fiercely, letting him softly cry into her shoulder, and she could feel her own eyes beginning to water as he broke down before her. He didn't deserve this, neither him nor Will. Or Joyce, for that matter! Her heart ached for this beautiful, little family that had withstood so many terrible things, both supernatural and otherwise.

Oh, how she wished that she could somehow wave a magic wand like a fairy godmother in a nursery rhyme and make it all go away: Lonnie and his abuse, the bullying, their financial troubles, and more than anything, the horrors that the Upside Down had wreaked upon their lives. But of course, she couldn't; fairy tales weren't something that could exist in real life... apparently, only the *scary* stories were real.

Minutes or hours could have passed that she just sat with him, lightly whispering sweet nothings and pressing soft kisses to his head. Eventually, his tears ceased, but he still remained relaxed against her as he began to take slow, even breaths again. Nancy took advantage of his regained calm and gently took his face between her hands, wiping away the remaining traces of tears with her thumbs. "Jonathan, look at me," she said, her voice gentle yet firm. She looked into his eyes until his gaze met hers and she knew that he was giving her his undivided attention. "You. Are. Not. *Useless*," she told him, moving her finger to his lips when he tried to open his mouth. "Ah-ah-ah, no. Don't you *dare* start arguing, Jonathan Byers. Just shut up and *listen to me*," she insisted. His eyes widened a bit at her forcefulness, but he closed his mouth and nodded. "First of all... you see things that other people don't," she began, cupping her hand around his cheek. "It's obvious in your photos; they're *amazing*. But it also makes you one of the most thoughtful people I know," she told him.

"Last year, you remembered my birthday... Steve didn't, most of my so-called "friends" didn't. Hell, my own *parents* barely acknowledged it," she exclaimed. "But when you came over that night to pick up Will, you brought me a cupcake. And Will gave me a card that he'd drawn himself... and to you, it probably seemed like nothing, but it made me *so happy*."

She could feel the tears welling up behind her eyes, and she bit down on her bottom lip to keep herself from crying. "You *care* about people, Jonathan. Both you *and* Will do. You give and you give and you never ask for anything in return... I honestly don't think I've ever met anyone else as genuinely *good* as you two," she said sincerely. "Jonathan, you *risked your life* with me last year just so we had a shot at saving Will and... and B—Barbara," she stuttered, the tears finally

starting to overflow at the mention of her late best friend. "And yesterday, you helped me break into a government lab, for Christ's sake!" she exclaimed. "Even though Will came back. Lord knows you didn't *have* to go with me... but you did. And I know for a fact that you're never going to ask to cash in any favors either because that's *not* the kind of person you are. You came with me because you *wanted* to," she reminded him, quickly scrubbing the tears off her face with the back of her hand.

"Jonathan, I don't know how much Bauman got right last night... and if you *do* have any sort of trust issues, I honestly wouldn't blame you. I know the world hasn't always been kind to you," she whispered. "But I want you to know that *I* trust you... honestly, more than anyone," she told him, taking his hand in hers. "And I hope that you'll trust me when I tell you that you are *NOT* *usele*—"

But she suddenly found herself unable to finish her sentence as his mouth covered hers, his arms slowly encircling her and pulling her close to him. This kiss was nothing like their frenzied one from last night; it was short and sweet, soft but with no less passion. She melted into him, tangling her fingers into his shirt as the tears on their faces mingled together, and when they broke apart, she still remained close enough that she could hear his heartbeat... or perhaps it was her own that she heard, ringing in her ears. Her head swam with emotion, and she couldn't seem to grasp a single thought until his voice cut through the fog.

"I *do* trust you," he breathed, leaning his forehead against hers. "And I'm *really* glad you trust me too."

"Yeah... I think it's you that needs a little more trust in *yourself*," she teased him, pushing his shoulder playfully. "Seriously, Jonathan, you don't give yourself enough credit for what an incredible person you are. I know it, your family knows it, the kids all look up to you... I'm pretty sure my *ex-boyfriend* even trusts you!"

Her spirits soared as she finally saw him smile for the first time all night. "Not as much as he trusts that baseball bat, I'll bet," he joked.

Nancy laughed, her heart feeling lighter as she noticed him cheering up. She took his chin in her hand and brought his face towards her



own. "Jonathan, as a very special someone told me a couple days ago, 'you need to cut yourself some slack.'"

He couldn't help but grin wider as she referenced their conversation on the car from the other day, where their ingenious plot was first formulated. He opened his mouth to retort, but much to his chagrin, a heavy yawn escaped instead of words.

The contagion of it caused her to let out a yawn of her own in response. Lifting her hand to his face, she gently ran her thumb across the dark shadows under his eyes. "I guess we should probably get some sleep, huh?" she murmured. However, she felt his body suddenly go tense at the idea; sleep meant nightmares. She frowned, observing the conflicted expression that now occupied his face. She knew this sort of apprehensiveness all too well after the events of last year, and she knew he'd struggled with a few periodic nightmares of his own, as well. But this... she knew that tonight, the night of his brother's exorcism, was a memory that would probably haunt him for the rest of his life, just as the loss of her best friend and her accidental visit to the Upside Down still plagued her own dreams. She sighed quietly, wishing he didn't have to go through it too.

But he wouldn't go through it alone; she wouldn't let him.

Without a word, she ran her hands soothingly up and down his arms and shoulders, lightly massaging them until his muscles relaxed and his eyelids began to grow heavy again. Before he could wake himself up again, she pressed her hand to his chest and gently pushed him down onto his mattress. He momentarily tightened his hold on her as she brought herself to her feet, but she gently shushed him with a kiss. "I'm just turning off the light," she explained to ease his worries. "I'm not leaving."

He gripped a small handful of her sleeve in response, shaking his head slightly. "On," he countered quietly, letting his arm fall back to his side. "Just leave them on, Nance."

The déjà vu feeling had never been stronger.

So with a nod, she crawled into bed with him and pulled his head into her lap, lightly running her fingers through the mess of his hair.

She wasn't really sure how much time passed that she tried to get him to sleep, but every so often, he'd jerk or startle himself awake, his eyes tired and bloodshot whenever he reopened them.

She had no idea what came over her next, but after a while, she found herself humming the tune to one of the only Talking Heads songs she knew, mostly just because it was their only love song and not as weird as a lot of their other stuff. But she knew Jonathan would appreciate it, and eventually, she found herself putting words to the melody.

*"Out of all those kinds of people*

*You got a face with a view*

*I'm just an animal looking for a home*

*Share the same space for a minute or two*

*And you love me till my heart stops*

*Love me till I'm dead*

*Eyes that light up, eyes look through you*

*Cover up the blank spots*

*Hit me on the head"*

Her sleepy brain couldn't recall the rest of the lyrics, so she just continued singing the verse she knew until his body finally became heavy with deep sleep. Sighing with relief, she smiled down at his still face before pulling a pillow haphazardly behind her head so she could try to get some rest, as well.

But after a while, she heard his voice again. "Nancy..."

"Hmm?" she replied, but she received no answer. Sitting up so that she could see him, she realized that he'd spoken in his sleep. Perhaps it was just because he'd been so overly exhausted, she rationalized to herself, but nevertheless, she could practically feel her heart doing somersaults at his unconscious mention of her name. She smiled

down at him elatedly and gently planted a kiss on his forehead before laying herself back down.

However, a couple minutes later, he continued. "Nancy, I—I... I love you, Nancy."

Her jaw dropped, and she had to clap her hand over her mouth to keep herself from letting out an audible yelp of surprise. She squeezed her eyes shut tightly, her tears threatening to make another appearance as she looked at his face once again. He was smiling softly, looking so peaceful and content she could've almost believed that the events of the night had never actually transpired.

And in that tranquil moment, she realized that the sentiment was no less true for her as she whispered the words that felt almost *too* natural... as if she'd known the truth of them all along.

"I love you too, Jonathan."

## 2. I guess this must be the place

No matter how many times it had happened in the past, Nancy hated waking up from nightmares. It was like her body was betraying her as she sat bolt upright in bed, shaking and trying not to wake the rest of her family by screaming aloud. When all she desperately wanted was to be able to calm herself down, her lungs would continue gasping for air, and her heart would race as if she'd just ran a marathon. And worst of all, nothing at all could stop the crying; even if she had to shove a fist in her mouth to keep herself quiet, the tears would continue to flow unceasingly down her face, soaking her pillow until she needed to flip it over to the other side just to get comfortable again.

Some nights, she could weather through the terror by herself. If it was close enough to sunrise that she didn't even feel like going back to sleep, she'd often just become accustomed to waking up early. She sometimes even *enjoyed* it: going down to the kitchen, making herself some tea, and reading a book from her childhood to remind herself of simpler times. But then there were nights where the Upside Down was inescapable, and Barb's voice continued to echo in her head, no matter how hard she tried to empty her mind, and the darkness outside seemed to swallow her whole until she was falling, falling, falling... trapped within the trees once again, but this time, there was no Jonathan to pull her back out of the void.

*Jonathan.*

Still crying, she turned her gaze to Mike's walkie-talkie on her bedside table; she'd grown used to having it near her during the night for this very reason, so that she could call Jonathan if she needed to hear his voice (or vice versa). Their brothers had been more than willing to let their older siblings have reign over the devices during the nighttime since both boys knew firsthand how devastating the nightmares could be. But Nancy hated showing weakness, and most nights, she never made it any further than switching to the channel she and her boyfriend shared. He often worked late nights at the Hawk, and because of this, she was loathe to wake him when she knew he needed his sleep.

But on nights like these, when she could barely catch her breath long enough to stop her head from spinning, these were the moments when she needed him. He was the only one who understood her fear, who knew how to help calm her down.

She reached out for the walkie with a shaking hand and pressed the button down. "J-Jonathan...? It's me," she stammered, swallowing down the lump in her throat. "Jon, do you copy?" she asked once more. "Jonathan?"

A few seconds passed before she heard him pick up on the other end. "Yeah, I'm here, Nancy," he replied, his voice still thick with sleep. "What's going on...? Are you okay?"

She took another shaky breath inward, more tears spilling down her face as she heard the concern in his voice. "I-I think I will be," she sighed, sniffing and wiping her sleeve across her face. "But... are you able to come over?" she asked, hating how feeble she sounded in that moment. "It's okay if—if you can't, I just—"

"I'm coming. I'll be there in ten."

She heard the click signaling that he had turned the device off, and she collapsed back onto her mattress with a loud exhale. *He's on his way*, she told herself, trying to coax herself back to a state of calm, but Barb's screaming face refused to leave her mind's eye.

*Help me, Nancy*, her frantic cries called. *I thought we were friends!*

Nancy choked on another sob. "You are, Barb," she whispered to herself, gripping her head between her hands. "You're my *best* friend."

*I DIED because of you!*

That did it... This was the territory Nancy never willingly dared to enter. She couldn't cope with the devastating knowledge that she could have saved her... had she only known about the danger outside, she could have looked out the window and made sure she got home safely. She could have asked Steve to walk the three of them to her car so that Barb was able to drive home. But no... Barb had been an afterthought that night, and now she was gone; she was

never coming home again.

She was so caught up in her guilty thoughts that she nearly jumped out of her skin when she heard a familiar tapping sound from her window. Her hand flew to her mouth to stifle a scream, but she let out a heaving sigh of relief when she saw Jonathan's silhouette crouched outside on the roof.

Taking a moment to steady herself, she wiped her face on the sleeve of her nightgown and made her way over to unlock her window, pushing it open quietly so that her parents wouldn't wake up and ground her into the nineties. However, she honestly couldn't believe her parents would be roused by anything at this point; Mike was the only one who'd ever woken up to one of her nightmares... or at least cared enough to check in on her.

Jonathan carefully shuffled inside and refastened the window lock before turning to face her, his eyes sad and sympathetic as he took in her teary, trembling form. He looked like he was about to say something, but after a moment or two, he simply held his arms out for her instead. She fell into them immediately, allowing herself to break down once again in his embrace. Her sobs became muffled in his chest as he pulled her close to him, his hand moving in small, soothing circles across her shaking back, and the longer he held her, her body seemed to grow heavier and heavier with exhaustion, both physical and emotional. Eventually, she sank down onto her carpeted floor in a pitiful heap, involuntarily pulling him along with her.

"Hey, it's okay. Come here," he whispered, pulling her into his arms. "I got you."

He gently brought her arms up to wrap around his neck as he picked her up and brought them to her bed. Her fingers gripped his shirt tightly as he gently laid her down and climbed in after her, pulling her against him under the covers. She continued to grab at him desperately like a lifeline, hoping that the haunting visions would leave her alone now that he was here beside her. But no matter how close she snuggled herself against his torso or how many gentle reassurances he whispered, she couldn't stop picturing her friend's demise at the hands of the Demogorgon. Her thoughts began to spiral once again: how alone Barb must have felt in her last moments, how

intense her pain must have been... and she didn't even realize she was hyperventilating again until Jonathan took her face between his hands.

"Nancy, it'll be alright. This is just a panic attack; I've had them too," he said softly, wiping the tears from under her eyes. "I know it sucks, but you've gotta slow down, okay? Take deep breaths," he told her, slowly filling and emptying his own lungs as a demonstration.

She felt like it was impossible, like her body would never obey her again, but she saw the care and concern for her in his eyes, and she knew she had to *try*, at the very least. She gritted her teeth and tried to force all of the air out of her body before taking it in again in a series of erratic gulps. She tried again, each attempt becoming a bit steadier than the last, albeit loud and shaky.

"That's it, Nance," he encouraged her. "In and out... in and out..."

She molded herself against him, trying to imitate his own breaths, until she finally felt the world come back into focus around her. She felt so incredibly tired, her anxious episode having robbed every last bit of her energy, but she wanted to do anything *but* sleep. Frankly, she felt like she couldn't even close her eyes without risking a recurrence of the horrible memories. So she just curled closer to Jonathan, nuzzling her nose into the space where his shoulder met his neck, and breathed in his familiar scent: woods, freshly-washed clothes, and a vague hint of the cigarettes his mom smoked, that his home smelled like. He carefully rested his chin on her head in response, wrapping his arms around her protectively. "I've got you, Nancy," he whispered. "You're okay."

They laid in comfortable silence for a while as he ran his fingers through her hair, gently smoothing through any tangles he met, before he spoke. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Nancy shivered at the thought of rehashing what she had seen, the things she had thought of... but she couldn't deny that she was bursting inside with the weight of it. She nodded minutely, letting out a long breath she hadn't even known she was holding. "Yeah, just... give me a minute."

He nodded in reply. "Take your time. I'm not going anywhere," he said with a small smile.

She couldn't help but smile a bit in return. He was so good to her, so understanding... how had she not seen it in him before? She tried not to think about it, knowing that this would just bring up more guilt for her, and she really didn't need that right now on top of everything else she was feeling.

Finally, once she felt like her thoughts were organized enough, she pulled away so that she could see his face. "I can't stop seeing her, Jon," she sighed, another tear leaking from the corner of her eye. "It was her birthday a couple days ago, and I think that's why it was so bad tonight. But I just still feel so damn responsible for what happened..."

Jonathan opened his mouth, undoubtedly to tell her that it wasn't her fault, but she cut him off. "No, please... just let me get this out," she insisted shakily. "I treated her like *garbage* that day, Jonathan. I must've made her feel so unimportant in comparison to..." she trailed off, not wanting to bring Steve into this conversation. "...in comparison to what I wanted that night," she continued, clenching her fists angrily as she recalled Barb's last words to her.

*This isn't you...*

"She was the best friend I could've ever asked for, Jonathan," she whimpered, choking on a sob as she spoke. "And she should be 18 years old now... we should be touring colleges and picking out dresses for senior prom and getting ready to graduate and leave this stupid town," she rattled off, her lip trembling. "But she's not... she got stuck with 16 lousy years, and now she's gone!"

And then she was crying again, not panicked like before, but raw and sorrowful like when the wound was fresh in her heart. She could tell by the expression on his face that Jonathan's heart was breaking for her as he pulled her head back to his chest. "I know it hurts, Nancy," he told her sadly. "Just let it out."

The tears continued to flow until she was certain there couldn't be a single drop of moisture left for her tear ducts to shed. But eventually,



just as always, she was able to control the sobs that racked her body, but the melancholy remained within her. It felt like a stone growing in the pit of her stomach, weighing heavier and heavier by the minute, almost like it could break through her at any moment. And although having Jonathan there with her definitely did something to lighten the load, she knew it was something that would never go away entirely. But she found herself drawn out of these thoughts when she felt her boyfriend gently lifting her face up to his.

"I know how much you miss her, Nancy... and I know how easy it can be to blame yourself for something horrible like this. Trust me, I know," he said. At her puzzled expression, he took her hand in his own and began to elaborate. "The night Will went missing, I was supposed to be there for him when he came home from your house. But I wasn't... I took a late shift for a friend, and... when we woke up the next morning, he was gone," he explained, nervously worrying his bottom lip between his teeth. Nancy's eyes widened a bit; he had never confided this in her before.

"I blamed myself for ages after that, even though Mom and Hopper and everyone told me it wasn't my fault. Even after Will came back, I still felt horrible," he told her. "I didn't start feeling better about it until Will found out, and he told me that the monster would've just taken both of us if I *had been* home. There was nothing we could've done."

He sighed, running a nervous hand through his hair. "What I'm trying to say is... sometimes bad things just happen. And it really *sucks* when they happen to good people," he said. "But this was because of the people at the Lab, and no one else. And if not Barbara, the Demogorgon might've taken someone else; Barb was just the one who was bleeding. And maybe if the timing had been different, it could have been you or me or Steve or someone else who had been around that night," he explained. "And I know if it was me, I wouldn't want anyone else to feel responsible for the terrible things that monster did."

She let the weight of his words sink in for a minute or two before she sighed with resignation, lacking the strength to argue with him. "I loved her so much... I still do."

"She loved you too, Nance. And if there's something that comes after all this, then she still does," he assured her. "She'd only want the best for you."

She nodded her head, knowing deep in her heart that his words were true. "God, I just really want to do right by her... do something that would make her proud, you know?"

Jonathan smiled. "Well, you took down Hawkins Lab, that's definitely something," he reminded her. "And judging by the stack of acceptance letters on your desk, you're definitely heading towards some great things."

"Excuse me, I believe WE took down the lab," she countered, poking him in the ribs. "Don't sell yourself short, Byers."

His smile only grew as he saw her returning to her normal, sassy self. "My apologies," he chuckled, leaning slightly forward so he could press a kiss to her forehead. "It was your idea though."

She let loose a few giggles of her own before she became quiet again, absentmindedly playing with a loose thread on his shirt, and he was more than content just to bask in the moment of restored calm. His arms instinctively readjusted their hold on her as she snuggled closer, tucking her head under his chin as she let out a near-silent yawn. "Thank you, Jonathan... for everything," she whispered. "I love you."

"I love you too," he replied, lightly trailing his fingers along the exposed skin of her arm. "Do you think you can fall back asleep?"

She sighed, pressing her lips together into a line. "I can try," she settled, slowly letting her eyelids flutter closed.

He nodded in understanding and continued drawing soft patterns in her skin in an attempt to relax her, and he suddenly found himself recalling how she'd done the same for him after they'd saved Will and El had closed the Gate. Remembering back to that night, he found himself quietly humming the same song she'd used to lull him into unconsciousness. And even though he didn't particularly treasure the sound of his own voice, he took David Byrne's lyrics down an octave and began to sing to her as she'd done for him:

*"Home is where I want to be  
But I guess I'm already there  
I come home - she lifted up her wings  
I guess that this must be the place  
I can't tell one from another  
Did I find you, or you find me?  
There was a time before we were born  
If someone asks, this is where I'll be"*

"This is where I'll be..." he whispered one last time as she dozed off, and as he let himself fall asleep as well, he knew that no truer words could ever be spoken. By her side, loving her... This is where he would *always* be.